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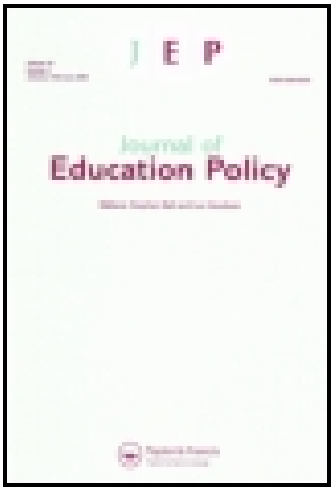

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Neighbourhood regeneration through mixed communities: a 'social justice dilemma'?

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Since 2005, the English government has adopted a policy of regenerating disadvantaged neighbourhoods by reconstructing them as mixed communities, in which schools appealing to higher income residents are a key feature. This creates some difficulties for those concerned with social justice, who support the notion of integrated schools and neighbourhoods, but are concerned that the re-modelling of neighbourhoods and schools in this way could further disadvantage existing populations. Mix is supported but mixing is opposed. This article interrogates this 'social justice dilemma' by analysing the origins and development of the mixed communities policy. It demonstrates the distinction between the principle of mix and the policy of mixed communities, while illuminating the political and discursive processes that conflate the two. Finally the authors indicate how research can be mobilised in support of neoliberal discourses about neighbourhoods and schools and draw some broader conclusions for education research and policy.

Keywords: schools; neighbourhoods; regeneration; policy; neoliberalism

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Introduction: regeneration through mixed communities

In England, the creation of mixed communities is now a key element in the government's approach to the regeneration of disadvantaged neighbourhoods. A specific programme, the 'Mixed Communities Initiative' (MCI), has been in place since January 2005. MCI aims to:

> remodel deprived [social housing] estates to create a more sustainable mix of housing types and tenures, and to address deep-seated problems of worklessness, low skills, crime, poor environments and poor health. (ODPM 2005b, 53)

Rather than attempting to regenerate neighbourhoods only by investment in the existing housing, services and facilities, the idea is to transform them by changes in the housing stock that will attract new, better-off residents. Places will be improved, and the intention is that residents on low incomes will benefit because they will no longer live in areas of concentrated poverty, and will have access to a wider range of resources and to more beneficial social networks. Although this policy does not originate in the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) and that department does not have explicit social mix policies, either in general or in relation to schools in regeneration areas,[1] there are clear implications for schools. As disadvantaged urban communities become more socially mixed, so too will their schools. Students of different backgrounds will in theory be spread more evenly around the school system, such that those who are most disadvantaged are not concentrated in the least advantaged schools.

While MCI itself currently only includes twelve demonstration projects, an announcement is expected in 2008 that the number will be extended substantially. Meanwhile, government is

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encouraging regeneration through mixed communities in other areas beyond the MCI, and putting in place the necessary planning and finance mechanisms (CLG 2006, 2007). Crucially, and this is a point we shall return to later, 'mixed communities' is also the government's core approach for *new* housing development.

In the United Kingdom, empirical evidence on the impact of mixed communities is still limited because the programmes are relatively new (Holmes 2006; Lupton et al. 2007). Our focus here is on the underlying assumptions and intentions of the policy, and its connections with broader political and ideological developments. Drawing on our experience as researchers on housing and regeneration throughout the period in which mixed communities policy has emerged, and on analysis of policy documents, speeches, government reports and coverage in the regeneration press, we review its origins and development, using a framework for policy analysis proposed in this journal by Ann Hodgson and Ken Spours (2006). We thus engage in some theory-borrowing from education to explore an intervention in urban policy, having in mind the implications of these interventions for schools and the wider parallels that might be drawn with policy in education.

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A social justice dilemma?

Our starting point is that 'mixed communities', as a tool for regeneration, is a policy that presents some difficulties for those concerned with social justice in housing, urban policy and education. At the level of the society or school system as a whole, having a more equitable distribution of resources and greater social integration must surely be a good thing. However, as we show, both theoretical concerns and emerging empirical evidence seem to suggest that mixing as a specific local intervention may be antithetical to principles of justice. We call this a social justice dilemma. Does a commitment to mix in general demand that specific policies of mixing must also be supported? Alternatively, does opposing the policy of mixed communities in regeneration areas contradict a long-standing commitment to social mix as a societal principle? Where *should* a concern with social justice position one in relation to this policy approach?

The mixed communities approach to regeneration incorporates both old and new elements. On the one hand, the sentiments it embodies recall historic attempts to deliver social class integration, equality and social cohesion through housing and planning policies, particularly the 1940s New Town developments (Bennett 2005). Commentators on mixed communities frequently cite Aneurin Bevan's famous evocation of socially mixed English village life and the need to reproduce it in new developments:

> We should try to introduce into our modern villages and towns what was always the lovely feature of English and Welsh villages, where the doctor, the grocer, the butcher and the labourer all lived in the same street. I believe it is essential for the life of a citizen … to see the living tapestry of a mixed community. (Quoted in Cole and Goodchild 2001)

Similar arguments were made about the comprehensive ideal of social mixed schools. A mixed communities approach appears to try to go back in time, to post-war social housing estates (and schools) that were de facto more mixed because they were relatively expensive to rent and thus only available to people on stable incomes – that is, before the boom in owner-occupation, large slum clearance programmes that created predominantly low-income estates, and the residualisation of council housing through policies of Right to Buy and allocations strictly on the basis of need (Holmans 1987; Feinstein et al. 2007).

On the other hand, it represents a significant departure from previous regeneration policy. The predominant approach to neighbourhood regeneration over the lifetime of successive governments since the 1960s has been the area-based initiative (ABI): additional short-to-medium-term central government grants targeted at specific areas. Such programmes have often involved

housing renewal alongside economic development and social welfare programmes. However, despite some encouragement of tenure diversification, they have tended to result in only minor change to the mix of housing tenure and incomes. They have aimed to improve rather than fundamentally transform poor neighbourhoods. This approach continued with the election of New Labour in 1997, with £2 billion invested in a new ABI, the New Deal for Communities (NDC). The newly elected government also moved to a more strategic approach to neighbourhood renewal. Its Social Exclusion Unit, based in the Cabinet Office, produced a report on neighbourhood problems (SEU 1998), and developed a cross-departmental 'national strategy for neighbourhood renewal' (NSNR; SEU 2001). However, although NSNR 'trailed' mixed communities with proposals for choice-based lettings for social housing, its main emphasis was on improving skills, employment, education and health, reducing crime and improving services. In other words, it continued the 'improvement approach' that had characterised previous policy.

When 'mixed communities' was announced in 2005, it was a significant new turn, in two ways. The first was that population change (mix) was a critical component. The second was that change is to be achieved largely through private sector investment. While previous ABIs have usually been expected to 'lever' private finance, the principal or at least initial funding source has been central government. In this case, local authorities are encouraged to work in new, entrepreneurial ways to create the opportunities and conditions for private investment – for example, by clearing sites for development, or by selling or giving publicly owned land to developers, in return for contributions to development of public housing, infrastructure or facilities.[2] We do not claim that mixed communities has complete discontinuity with recent policy. It still involves investment in social and economic programmes, and still has NSNR's emphasis on the targeting and coordination of mainstream programmes towards the poorest neighbourhoods. For example, mixed communities demonstration projects typically involve the provision of new school facilities through the Building Schools for the Future Programme, or because they are priority areas for new Academy schools. However, mixed communities is more fundamentally transformative, and delivered with greater reliance on the private sector than previous policy, and a significant departure from early New Labour interventions.

It is in blending old principles with new policies that mixed communities presents something of a dilemma for those concerned with social justice. It harks back to eras of greater social equality. It appeals to concerns about even distribution of resources and opportunities: concerns that the least advantaged in society should not be segregated in physically or social isolated areas with the worst housing, environments and neighbourhood resources and the least effective schools. It seems to put into practice the ideals of integrated neighbourhoods that have been at the heart of civil rights movements. In education, where current government policies in the United Kingdom to increase choice and diversity of provision seem likely to lead to increased social stratification (Burgess, Propper, and Wilson 2005), mixed communities with mixed schools seem to appeal to the comprehensive ideal of social and educational mix. They seem to suggest possibilities of greater social integration and cohesion (Phillips 2005), and to recognise the evidence that, whether due to peer effects or contextual effects on organisation, management, curriculum and pedagogy, schools with very highly disadvantaged intakes tend to struggle more than those with a balanced composition, thus putting their students at a further disadvantage (Thrupp 1999). On these bases, who could oppose a policy of mix?

On the other hand, a policy of mixing communities that have become un-mixed often sits uncomfortably with a social justice perspective. In principle, the act of trying to achieve a different mix, and therefore necessarily aiming towards the needs and demands of a more advantaged clientele, seems at odds with an orientation towards distributive justice. While creating a brand new mixed community involves reserving a certain amount of the new housing for people who could not afford to buy it on the open market, creating a mixed community in an

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existing area could mean the opposite: removing some social housing to make room for market-rate homes (although this is not necessarily the case) and/or displacing some existing residents. Other services also need to become geared more towards the advantaged, rather than orienting themselves to the needs of the existing population. This is rather at odds with the approach typically taken, and the principle often adopted by social welfare providers, as neatly summarised by a local education authority (LEA) official interviewed by Silverman, Lupton, and Fenton (2006, 62) about how school provision might need to change to meet the needs of a new, mixed population:

> We don't think of education provision in those terms. We expect the school to serve all children in the community. We certainly aren't looking at a tenure-specific pattern of provision or a social origin pattern of provision … If anything, we would need a poorer standard of provision in wealthier areas since we wouldn't have so many children with special needs. (LEA officer)

Whitty (2007) has recently remarked on a high-profile example of this apparent contradiction. Concerns have been raised about the changing social composition of Academy schools, which are increasingly being used as a tool for re-modelling school provision as part of mixed community developments, and some of which have used their freedoms over admissions to admit more advantaged intakes (PWC 2007). In increasing mix, they appear to be favouring the privileged. Thus, on the one hand, social justice demands mix at the level of the social and educational system, and on the other, it seems to oppose mix*ing* as a specific policy intervention to mix neighbourhoods (and schools) which have become un-mixed.

These two positions are not necessarily inconsistent, but unless it is clearly articulated what is good about mix as a system principle and what is bad about mix as a regeneration tool, they can appear so, and no clear stance emerges on the implications of mix in its various forms for social justice outcomes.

Whitty argues, and we agree, that to a certain extent, clarification will come through empirical evidence. Interventions to mix communities may achieve much-needed improvements. To take a real example, in north-east Coventry, 1700 homes (mostly social housing) are to be replaced by a higher density development of 3630 new properties, increasing overall levels of owner-occupation from 14% to 60%. The development will also include a new neighbourhood and leisure centre, youth centre, integrated neighbourhood centres, and environmental enhancements. New schools have already been provided. This represents major investment in an area which has been desperately in need of it, and without direct additional central government funding. Residents affected by the demolition are guaranteed new accommodation if they wish to stay – an offer made possible by building at higher density. Whether they do remain, whether the remodelled neighbourhood is really better for them than the old, and whether rising land values make the neighbourhood unaffordable for other people like them as time goes on are matters of (future) fact. In other cases, it seems more likely that social housing units may be lost, that representative governance structures may not be established, and that people will be involuntarily displaced (Lupton et al. 2007). These are matters for empirical investigation. On the educational side, as Whitty (2007) says, whether Academies becoming more mixed is a good thing or a bad one depends largely on what happens to those students who would have been in the (un-mixed) Academy had more middle-class students not been attracted. If they have been moved further from home into another disadvantaged school, there is a clear problem. If, however, all schools are becoming more mixed and decisions to move schools have been a matter of choice, or indeed the Academy is simply bigger than the old school so that proportions can change without any actual displacement, outcomes overall may well be better.

However, we also suggest that closer policy analysis can help here, by scrutinising the way in which the idea of mix and its benefits as a regeneration tool have been conceived and

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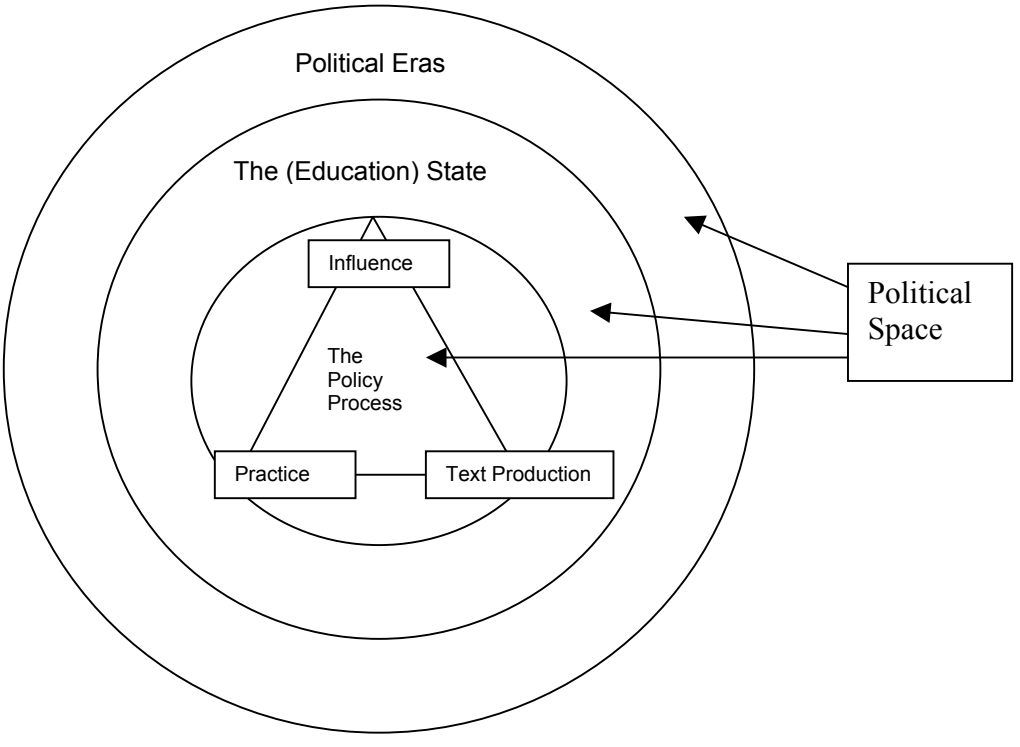

Figure 1. An Analytical Policy Framework (reproduced from Hodgson and Spours 2006, 685).

operationalised in policy texts, in relation to broader notions of societal mix and concerns with social justice. Policy analysis may help anticipate policy outcomes, or at least the empirical questions that need to be asked. In what follows, we review the mixed communities policy in regeneration using Hodgson and Spours' (2006) model, in which they propose that policy development (and potentially policy outcomes) can be understood through the use of four conceptual tools or 'dimensions': the political era, which they see as framing and providing the context for the state[3] and the policy process, and the notion of political space, which they define as 'the opening up of opportunity for different stakeholders to influence the policy process' (690). Their model is set out in Figure 1.

Redefining problem and solution: mixed communities and neoliberal economics

The first thing that is evident is that the political era (neoliberalism, since the early 1980s) that has given rise to mix as a solution to the difficulties of low-income neighbourhoods is very different from the one (Keynesian, post–World War 2) in which mix featured strongly as a system principle for housing and education. Both problem and solution are defined in new ways.

It is important to distinguish between epochs within the current era, and to offer a nuanced view of the neoliberal influence. In policy terms, New Labour has given a much higher profile than the Conservatives to the existence of extreme social and economic disadvantage in particular areas, and invested significantly more in local programmes. Poor neighbourhoods have been left much less to the vicissitudes of the market and any notion that benefits of economic growth might 'trickle down' than they were under the Conservatives. There is clearly a Third Way 'settlement' at work, rather than a pure neoliberal approach. This is the case even with mixed communities

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policy, where the targeting of mainstream funds towards the poorest neighbourhoods remains a feature. One could argue it is particularly so with mixed communities, where the state is effectively engaging in 'social engineering' (Anon 2006), albeit through market mechanisms.

However, at the same time, the idea of mixing communities as a route to their regeneration is one that appears to be directly underpinned by neoliberal economics. From another perspective, the disadvantages of low-income neighbourhoods could be seen as a product of the economic and social structure produced by global free market capitalism: the stripping out of jobs in the interests of global competitiveness, suppression of wages at the lower end of the labour market, and rising inequality combined with marketised social provision, which enables the better-off to buy themselves out of worst-off areas. As Massey (2007) points out in relation to London, the city is poor *because*, not despite the fact that, it is also rich. Such a perspective has led in the past to investment in ameliorative interventions at the neighbourhood level, to compensate for the market. It might also lead to macro-economic policies to regulate markets, limit unfettered growth and re-distribute its benefits; in other words to seeking the solutions to neighbourhood problems in broader economic and social structures.

However, analysis of policy texts, local planning and consultation documents, websites, speeches and soundbites since the late 1990s reveals a re-narration of neighbourhood problems, not as structural, but as individual and spatial. It appears here that the problem is one not of the structure itself, but of maladjustment to the new economic structure. Some would argue that neighbourhood-based interventions have always been based on a spatialisation of structural problems, but this has been particularly strongly articulated under New Labour. Thus low-income neighbourhoods are discursively framed as collections of individual problems: 'worklessness, low aspirations and low skills'. There is an emphasis on 'neighbourhood effects': 'the additional disadvantages that affect poorer people when they are concentrated in poor neighbourhoods' (ODPM 2005b, 52), highlighting that the problem is that poor people live together, not their poverty *per se* nor the economic re-structuring that has left some areas with insufficient secure, meaningful and well-paid work. Emphasis is given to the spatial ordering of problems, not as a manifestation of structural deficiencies, but in terms which appear to emphasise the spatial behaviour of people: 'concentration', 'clustering', 'pockets of poverty', 'segregation'. Moreover, a new truth has seemed to emerge, at odds with the accounts of many residents, that where the poor cluster, communities necessarily fail, despite welfarist policies of amelioration. As the relevant minister at the time put it:

> We know that communities with a high concentration of single-tenure, low income residents have not worked in the past, and will not work in the future. (David Miliband 2005, quoted in Weaver 2006)

The discourse of the market is also dominant. Neighbourhoods are described in relation to their utility in terms of individual outcomes (i.e. they have negative or positive effects on individuals), more so than as social or micro-economic spaces. They are seen commodities in a market for residential location, where successful consumers should be able to choose and move in order to maximise outcomes. Successful neighbourhoods are defined by their market position: 'in demand', 'attractive', 'popular'; unsuccessful ones as having temporarily failed as housing markets (Leather, Cole, and Ferrari 2007), or being prevented from operating as markets by the provision of state housing. Social housing itself is increasingly presented as problematic because, reportedly, it constrains tenants' capacity to move in search of work (Hills 2007).

This discursive framing of poor neighbourhoods provides a framework in which the obvious solution is not to challenge structural inequalities, but to engage in spatial re-ordering: to 'break up', 'dissolve', 'de-concentrate' poverty, to engineer beneficial social networks, restore functioning housing markets, and set free the market processes that will deliver greater neighbourhood resources and better individual outcomes. Herein, in a sense, lies the root of the social justice

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dilemma. Mixed communities and mixed schools represent equality of access to homes, places and local resources, and the opportunity for social integration: the opposite of what global free trade capitalism and local market forces seem likely to produce. In offering mixed communities as a policy principle, and one that covers new housing as well as old, New Labour appeals to these sentiments, and to the desire to remedy the injustices of area disadvantage in fundamental and long-lasting ways. However, in proposing mixed communities as a specific policy intervention for neighbourhoods that have become un-mixed, the government also seems to accept and be constrained by neoliberalism. It appears to present disadvantaged individuals as at least part of the problem, and offer the market as the solution, without offering a challenge to the source of the problem at the system level. It is a principle that is hard to challenge but an intervention that is hard to accept.

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The re-configuration of the regeneration state

The second point that emerges from this analysis is that mixed communities as a regeneration policy has emerged from re-alignments within the state, and between state, market and community. These realignments are both 'a manifestation of the political era and a reinforcing element within it' (Hodgson and Spours 2006, 687): they help to provide both discursive underpinning and the possibilities of enactment to the neoliberal narrative of neighbourhood problems and solutions described above.

Changes have occurred in three policy arenas: urban policy, local government, and housing. As Smith and Lupton note in the introduction to this issue, there has been a renewed focus on urban revitalisation and competitiveness in the United Kingdom since 2000. With it have come new governance structures and institutions (city mayors in some areas, Urban Regeneration Companies in others) and a new entrepreneurial and competitive style to urban governance. This has been reinforced by an evolving process of local government reform, which re-formulates the role of the local authority as strategic planner and commissioner of services, in partnerships with other agencies and the community and private sector through Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs), and which allows a certain level of local autonomy within the confines of targets and accountability regimes established by central government. Meanwhile, a range of housing policy reforms, some pre-dating New Labour, have increased the involvement of the private sector: the transfer of an increasing proportion of the social housing sector to Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) which can borrow in financial markets, Private Finance Initiatives (PFIs) to refurbish social housing; the development of shared ownership housing; and most recently, the opening up of social housing grant to private sector companies. The distinction between the financing and construction of private and public housing has become more blurred.

These changes are clearly not pure manifestations of neoliberalism, in which markets should run more or less unfettered from state intervention. Rather, they reflect Third Way politics, in which the state intervenes to provide the conditions for economic growth but also to incorporate and regulate market activity, positioning itself as a broker of social and economic innovations, and as commissioner and monitor of public services (Ball 2007, 5), in the process re-making state institutions in the image of the market. However, they drive regeneration policy, in a practical sense, towards a mixed communities approach with its embedded neoliberal interpretation of neighbourhood problems and solutions. Increasingly, social housing depends on private sector involvement to finance new development and refurbish existing homes (Monk et al. 2006). Emphasising urban competitiveness and renaissance repositions the problems of poor neighbourhoods in relation to the strategic needs of the city as a whole. A strong central government performance management regime incentivises radical change for local authorities and RSLs, who are under pressure to meet targets.

Changes have also occurred in power relations between the central and local state, private and third sectors, which raise specific concerns for social justice. Whatever local attempts are made to engage communities in the regeneration process, the reality is that neighbourhood transformation through private sector investment depends on private sector willingness to invest. This inevitably puts public and third sectors in less powerful positions to protect community interests, such as the levels of affordable housing that can be provided (Anastacio, Gidley, and Hart 2000).

We also suggest that changes in the state provide discursive underpinning to the idea that low-income neighbourhoods are inherently problematic. Under the imperative of urban economic renaissance, poor neighbourhoods can be seen as holding back investment, particularly in inner urban areas where low-income residents occupy prime commercial or residential space and hold down land values, or even prevent the existence of a housing market because of their predominance of publicly owned housing stock. In one striking example, Middlesbrough mayor Ray Mallon described a particular inner city area as a 'cancer' in the heart of the city that needed to be 'cut out' (McKenzie 2005). As Ball (2007) has noted, urban entrepreneurialism also brings with it a new language of dynamic change. Areas will be 'transformed' and 're-modelled', and regeneration will go 'further and faster' (ODPM 2005b, 53). In this context, existing communities may be positioned as potentially holding back transformation, either because democratic processes are too slow, or because of potential resistance. Katz (2004, 26), for example, argues that neighbourhood transformation 'requires a dynamic, market-driven notion of neighbourhood change, rather than any "community control" vision dedicated to maintaining the status quo'. Note in this quotation the presentation of two alternatives, dynamic change (good) or status quo (bad), although the actual accounts of residents rarely claim to retain the status quo, rather to improve their neighbourhoods while retaining their identity and community (Lupton 2003). The juxtaposition of these two apparent policy alternatives, and the exclusion of intermediate options, relegate all aspects of the current situation to a redundant or undesired status. As Massey has put it (2007, 23) in another context, 'the contemporaneous multiplicities of space are denied' and the actually existing characteristics of neighbourhoods simplified and 'realigned to being merely a matter of their being "behind" in the historical queue'.

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The policy process: policy transfer and integrated policy making

The third key feature of the mixed communities policy is that it emerged through a process of policy transfer from the United States, drawing on the ideas and knowledge of an elite policy network, and tapping into established discourses of neighbourhood (and public housing) problems, transformation and the market.

In the early 2000s, Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott and departmental officials made a number of visits to the United States to examine a federally funded programme of investment in 'severely distressed' public housing, known as HOPE VI (Home Ownership and Opportunities for People Everywhere). At its inception in 1992, HOPE VI had initially involved a significant spend on public housing rehabilitation, but by the mid-1990s, the focus had shifted to demolition and the creation of mixed-income housing. A key contact was Bruce Katz of the Brookings Institution in Washington, DC, an architect of HOPE VI and a strong advocate of community transformation through mix. During 2003/4, he became 'a regeneration guru to the [British] government … (with) the ear of the ODPM and the Treasury' (Smit 2005). In 2004, his Brookings colleague Alan Berube was seconded to HMT to work on mixed communities policy, producing a report on mixed communities in England from a US perspective (Berube 2005). Significantly, this was published by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF), which also sponsored a further suite of research reports and established a working group to influence policy and practice in the direction of mixed communities. In 2004, just months before the MCI announcement, Katz gave a

speech advocating mixed communities (Katz 2004) at JRF's centenary event, where he shared a platform with Gordon Brown. As a result of these interactions, and despite mixed evidence from US research (Popkin et al. 2004; Houghton 2006; Popkin 2007), Gordon Brown was able to claim in his evidence to the House of Commons Select Committee on the Treasury that 'the evidence from what has been tried in other countries is good' (Brown 2005), and the mixed communities approach was born. Its basis in HOPE VI is widely acknowledged in the housing world (e.g. Salman 2006).

There are a number of important points about this policy process that we do not have space to elaborate on, most particularly its relationship to re-alignments within the state. It was the increasing dominance of Her Majesty's Treasury (HMT) and No. 10 Downing Street in the detail of regeneration policy, and the increasing use of performance targets to manage the activities both of government departments and local authorities, that provided the context for policy borrowing. Thus, as Hodgson and Spours (2006) indicate, state formation frames the policy process.

However, two points are particularly important. One is to note what has and has not been transferred. In fact the UK mixed communities approach is substantially different from the HOPE VI programme, with no direct central government funding, and no deliberate intention to displace current residents, unlike HOPE VI, which gave vouchers to social tenants to relocate to private rented accommodation. In terms of potential outcomes, this is crucial. 'Travelling policy' has been moderated as it has come up against 'embedded policy' (Ozga and Jones 2006) in the United Kingdom, which has a much more substantial history of public intervention and welfare support in low-income neighbourhoods. Existing residents have more protection than they do in the United States.[4] However, what has not been moderated is the enthusiasm for the idea of mixed communities, the discourse of transformation, and the acceptability of previously sensitive approaches such as large-scale demolition and the transfer of local state assets into private ownership to stimulate housing market renewal.

A second point is that learning from HOPE VI happened as part of a process of what we might call continuous or integrated policy making. Hodgson and Spours (2006) also observed this in relation to education policy. Specific policy documents have given way to a smoother, integrated approach in which policy principles appear over time in a range of announcements, strategies and plans, and in which it is difficult to identify critical moments of 'text production' (Hodgson and Spours 2006). A notable feature of the mixed communities approach to neighbourhood regeneration is that it has never appeared as a stand-alone policy, nor as part of an overall regeneration strategy. Rather it appears, and is reiterated, as a subsection of broader housing and planning policies, in the action plans for Sustainable Communities (ODPM 2005a, b), and the Housing Green Paper (CLG 2007), in which mix is more broadly promoted by policies to ensure a certain amount of social and affordable housing in all new private developments. This is a crucial point. It allows mix as an intervention in particular neighbourhoods, with the attendant consequences for existing communities, to be conflated with mix as a general principle in the planning of new neighbourhoods.

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Political space and researcher engagement

The fourth issue that we identify is the role of research in shaping mixed communities policy. We relate this to Hodgson and Spours' (2006) concept of 'political space', in which state and non-state agents come to influence policy. Again there is much more to be said about political space under New Labour and in relation to mixed communities than we have space for here. The key point in relation to our question is the role of research.

Regeneration policy throughout the period we discuss has been characterised by a conscious and public use of research evidence, utilising newly available data and increasingly sophisticated

research techniques which have helped both to frame and inform policy debate. Five areas have been particularly significant: a growing body of work on the geography of poverty, qualitative studies on neighbourhood conditions and trajectories, quantitative work on 'neighbourhood effects', an ESRC-funded programme on cities, competitiveness and cohesion, and a set of economic studies on the problem of 'low-demand' housing and the functioning of sub-regional housing markets.

On the one hand, this indicates a high level of engagement by researchers in evidence-informed policy. Certain works, particularly William Julius Wilson's (1987) study *The Truly Disadvantaged*, helped to open up political debate about low-income neighbourhoods. However, in some respects, the type of research undertaken may have served to reinforce the discursive position of poor neighbourhoods in Third Way politics. Political space is not just 'activity space' but also 'discursive space'. What is said and the terms in which the debate is framed are at least as important as the interactions that take place. In this case, the scalar shift to research on cities and wider housing markets has provided the intellectual weight and empirical support for urban renaissance policies and housing market renewal, strengthening understandings that neighbourhood fortunes need to be seen in the light of wider strategic objectives. Better knowledge of the geography of poverty helped spatial aspects of poverty to become more dominant in debate. Perhaps most importantly, quantitative area effects research has unwittingly lent weight to the idea that poor people are bad for each other. Most typically, in such research, the characteristic of neighbourhood that is described is how many poor people live there, because this is what is available to measure. Place factors such as lack of community resources or poor neighbourhood environments, and structural factors such as de-industrialisation or racial or postcode discrimination, cannot be included in these models. 'Neighbourhood effects' thus tend to be spoken of as 'people effects': out-of-work role models; anti-social peer groups; lack of bridging social capital; lack of resources to support neighbourhood shops and so on, implying that it is the characteristics and interactions of the poor themselves that account for limited individual outcomes in areas of concentrated poverty (Joseph, Chaskin, and Webber 2007). It is a short step from there to the assumption that the solution is to reduce the proportion of poor people, rather than to address structural inequalities or inject additional resources to provide the services that people need.

Conclusion

We started with the suggestion that a mixed communities approach to regeneration seems to offer something of a dilemma to those concerned with social justice, seeming to appeal to desired societal goals of social integration, equality and cohesion but perhaps threatening to further advance privileged interests at the expense of those of the poor.

Our analysis of the development of the policy demonstrates that while it uses the same terms and appears in the same policy documents as the mixed communities approach to housing and planning in general, it has different origins. Mixing for regeneration originates in a neoliberal analysis of the problems of low-income neighbourhoods, in which structural problems are individualised and spatialised, and disadvantaged neighbourhoods, particularly those with majority social housing tenure, are discursively repositioned as irredeemably problematic. Drawing heavily on US policy and discourse, it relies on market solutions, in the context of new modes of urban governance that reposition neighbourhoods in relation to the broader interests of the competitive city. Its finance and delivery mechanisms shift power relations, with increased influence for the private sector.

On these grounds, we suggest that its political and discursive underpinnings are contradictory with those that underpin historic commitments to desegregation and socially mixed communities and schools. From a social justice perspective, support for mix should be accompanied by a strong

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critique of mixing as currently conceived. System inequalities cannot be fixed by solutions at the neighbourhood level, especially when these are designed in the same image as the system that makes them necessary. Mix as a system goal and mix as a regeneration tool should not be confused, although we can identify political and discursive processes by which they are; for example, new modes of policy text production, appeals to historic principle and sentiment, and the take up of research in support of dominant neoliberal discourses.

Some if not all of the issues we have raised are transferable to discussions about mix in education, in wider contexts beyond simply that of neighbourhood regeneration. There are particular implications for research. Just as 'area effects' research has seemed to inadvertently support the discursive presentation of poor neighbourhoods as problematic and the product of cultures of poverty, school composition research also might also be utilised to blame disadvantaged students for dragging down each other's performance, and in support of policies of school closure, exclusion or within-school streaming practices. Of course, it could also be mobilised to draw down resources into disadvantaged schools, but this depends very much on the political environment. As researchers, we must articulate very clearly why certain mixes are problematic, and what policy solutions do and do not follow.

To turn full circle, none of this necessarily means that mixed communities and the school systems they produce will have unjust outcomes. In Sayer's words 'the extent to which they [discourses] produce what they name is a matter for empirical research' (Sayer 2005, 76, cited in Ball 2007, 1). The mixed communities approach in the United Kingdom comes with significantly more safeguards than its counterpart in the United States, and it will play out in neighbourhoods with a long history of area interventions and strong structures for community participation in governance. However, scrutinising the policy from a social justice perspective should at least mean that we approach empirical research as 'act of repositioning', which 'in essence says that the best way to understand what any set of institutions, policies, and practices does, is to see it from the standpoint of those who have the least power' (Apple 2006, 229). If so, that will be a useful intervention in political space.

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Notes

1. There are interesting contrasts in the treatment of 'mix' between current housing and education policies, and particularly by comparison with France, where 'la mixité sociale' and 'la mixité scholaire' seem to be seen as parallel goals. This is the subject of a paper in development by the first author.
2. In this respect, mixed communities has more in common with the Urban Development Corporations established by the Conservative government in the 1980s than with ABIs, although even these had pump-priming funds as well as tax relief.
3. Hodgson and Spours refer to 'the education state'. Here we translate the notion to the neighbourhood renewal field as 'the regeneration state'.
4. This point also applies to schools. While US and UK policy may be broadly following the same choice and diversity agenda, the United Kingdom has stronger mechanisms to protect against poorer outcomes for disadvantaged residents – for example, the strengthened Admissions Code.

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